

	CONSERVATION	1
	FARMING	2
	WOODLANDS	2
	FISHFARMING & FISHERIES	2
	MARINE	4
	POLITICS & PARLIAMENT	5
	GENERAL ENVIRONMENT	5
	ENERGY	7
	TOURISM & RECREATION	8
	NEWS OF ORGANISATIONS	8

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CONSERVATION

HEN HARRIER SURVEY

The fifth national hen harrier survey was carried out in 2016 by the RSPB, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the Scottish Raptor Study Group, along with a range of other UK partners. The survey shows that the total population of hen harriers is estimated to be 460 breeding pairs, 80% of the UK population; the 2010 survey reported 505 pairs in Scotland. This is the second successive decline in the Scottish hen harrier population revealed by national surveys. Over the last 12 years, the number of breeding pairs has fallen by 27% in Scotland. The majority of Scotland's breeding harriers (an estimated 175 breeding pairs) are found in the west Highlands, while Orkney and the Hebrides were the only areas to show a slight increase in numbers.

Duncan Orr-Ewing, of RSPB Scotland, said: "The hen harrier is an indicator of the health of our upland environment, and the fact that its population continues to decline is of major concern. The hen harrier is a high priority for our conservation work and urgent steps need to be taken to tackle illegal killing of this species and to improve their moorland breeding habitats."

Eileen Stuart, of SNH, said: "While Scotland remains the stronghold for hen harriers in the UK, the continuing decline is a serious concern particularly the low numbers found in parts of the mainland. We're committed to continuing to work with a wide range of partners to tackle wildlife crime through PAW Scotland, including initiatives such as Heads up for Harriers, and General Licence restrictions where evidence supports such action. SNH and Forestry Commission Scotland have set up a joint Raptor Working Group to identify and promote the opportunities of forestry for raptors, including hen harriers, to sustainably deliver Scottish Government environmental and forestry policy."

Wendy Mattingley, of the Scottish Raptor Study Group, said: "For the population to begin to recover and expand over all suitable habitat, the intensively managed grouse moors of east and south Scotland must produce successful breeding hen harriers again."

Tim Baynes, of the Scottish Moorland Group, said: "Harrier breeding fluctuates annually for many reasons – not all associated with wildlife crime. For example, 2016 was a poor year largely due to low vole numbers in Scotland with weather and predation shown to have played their part. 15 of our members, covering an area of 325,000 acres, will be working with the Heads Up for Harriers project again this year to better to understand the reasons for poor harrier breeding and to help rebuild the harrier population."

A Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) statement said that the results of the survey indicate that balance in moorland conservation and management is needed more than ever. The UK's objective must be to enhance the community of raptors in the country as a whole. In some species this will need improvements in food supply or nest protection. In other places reducing the predation pressure by raptors, including hen harriers, on wildlife using the most satisfactorily humane methods will encourage their protection and conservation.

Dr Adam Smith said: "We need an adaptive approach whereby agreements are reached between landowners and government, allowing sustainable numbers of both raptors and prey to be achieved ... Grants, intra-guild effects, limited culls, target predator densities and other mechanisms should be used in this way to serve the long-term interest of raptors as well as game species and other wildlife. The GWCT condemns crimes against wildlife. We are committed to finding an effective and practical resolution to the conflict between red grouse and raptors. Wildlife crime only serves to delay a satisfactory resolution of the conflict."

ORKNEY STOATS

RSPB Scotland has criticised the Scottish Government and SNH for delays in funding stoat eradication in Orkney [Jan 17]. Stoats were first introduced to Orkney in 2010. Stuart Housden, of RSPB Scotland, said that the Scottish Government had a legal responsibility to protect Orkney's ground-nesting bird populations and the Orkney vole. He said that, if action was not taken soon, the stoats would spread onto all the islands and called for SNH to act 'with some urgency.'

A successful eradication programme could cost up to £5m, take four to five years, and involve thousands of traps being placed across Orkney for several years. A large scale partnership project would require to be set up.

SNH has now submitted a preliminary application to the Heritage Lottery Fund to seek funding. SNH had been consulting UK and world experts on how to tackle the stoats, and that had taken time. Graham Neville, of SNH, said that the Orkney programme would be 'four times larger' than any stoat eradication project anywhere in the world. He said: "And it's unique, because, in Orkney, you've got inhabited islands. There's farming. Stoat eradications previously have only ever been done on uninhabited, or very sparsely inhabited, islands."

LAND STEWARDSHIP

The Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) has published a Land Stewardship Policy, which shows how land management should be supported in Scotland after the UK leaves the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in a way that safeguards wildlife and provides a high-quality natural environment, while also supporting the rural economy.

The blueprint outlines a number of solutions for safeguarding and enhancing the natural capital value of land in Scotland, and shows how these measures could be paid for within the Scottish Government's current spending plans. It establishes a new system of support for farming with three tiers of payments designed to maintain, enhance and restore natural capital, underpinned by regulations that support these measures.

It also calls for a target to create one million hectares of new native woodland by 2050, bringing Scotland's total woodland cover to 30%, and prioritises grant support for creating new native woodland through planting and natural regeneration. Better stewardship of wild deer includes targets for deer management being agreed with SNH and carried out in a way that reduces impacts and improves the condition of habitats. Grouse moors should be licenced and

there should be tighter controls on the burning of moorland vegetation (muirburn) to limit this practice to grouse moors, and prevent burning of sensitive habitats including peatlands.

The policy states that dedicated funds ought to support a range of activities including the Scottish Government's target of restoring 300,000 hectares of peatland by 2032, work to improve the condition of lochs and rivers and implement natural flood management, control and eradication of invasive non-native species, and the creation of a National Ecological Network.

Jonny Hughes, of SWT, said: "The CAP has been one of the biggest forces shaping Scotland's environment and economy over the past four decades. After Brexit the Scottish Government is likely to be in charge of how, and how much, public money is spent. With finances under increasing pressure we need a new system that clearly links public money with public benefit to ensure that there is continued support for the rural economy. A land stewardship approach involves living within our means, aiming to getting the best from our land while ensuring it is sustainably managed. Adopting this approach would allow us to create a healthier countryside, where producing quality food and other commodities from a quality environment becomes the new cultural norm."

Anne Gray, of Scottish Land & Estates (SLE) said: "For the majority of SLE's members, land stewardship is at the heart of their approach to land use decision making. As an organisation we are committed to supporting land ownership and management which is modern, forward-thinking and relevant to the needs of today. While we do not sign up to all of the proposals within the SWT's blueprint, we can all agree that it is vital that we enable and support the restoration, maintenance and enhancement of Scotland's natural assets for the long-term. Without these we would not have the basis for a land-based economy, rural tourism, thriving rural communities or a good quality of life."

Christopher Nicholson, of the Scottish Tenant Farmers Association, said: "Whatever the outcome of Brexit, within a couple of years Scotland will need to have a new agricultural policy ready to replace the CAP, and the SWT have made a good start with this Land Stewardship Policy. Farmers may not agree with all of it, but the key principles set out should help support sustainable and resilient farming businesses and present a strong case to maintain agricultural support payments. At the core is the need for farms to provide additional public goods such as wildlife habitats to defend the budget for farm support, much of which can be incorporated by farm businesses without compromising agricultural output. Some measures, including the protection and enhancement of soil productivity, are win-wins for both farming and the environment. The policy provides a blueprint for stakeholders to consider, and is clear that in developing the proposals close consultation will be required with the farming industry."

See: <http://bit.ly/2sTUWdN>



FARMING

CAP CONVERGENCE

Under the last Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform, the EU set out to redistribute direct payments more equitably across Europe based on an average euros *per* hectare. Member states receiving less than 90% of the EU average would be awarded an uplift in order to move towards a minimum rate per hectare. This would have seen

up to £190m over six years returned to Scotland. Instead, Scotland received around £30m under the UK government's allocation.

Rural Secretary, Fergus Ewing, said: "Without the Scottish rate, there would have been no extra money for the UK. For example, had the full allocation been delivered to Scotland, instead of being shared across the UK on a historic basis, our hill farmers could have an extra £14,000 over the six year payment period, a significant amount for farmers, although of course the actual amount would depend on the scale of the business. There is currently no level playing field north and south of the border. Farmers doing the same job in different parts of the UK do not presently receive comparable levels of payments for their hard work. This money rightly belongs to Scottish farmers and should be returned to them immediately."

AGRICULTURE FACTS & FIGURES

The Scottish Government has produced a *Facts and Figures* card for the agriculture sector. It has also published, online, a spreadsheet containing a large number of tables of data, previously published in the annual Economic Report on Scottish Agriculture. That report has now moved to being produced every five years, but all the data is still being made available on the government's website.

See: <http://bit.ly/2rW4wVx>; <http://bit.ly/2rmyYt8>

AGRI-ENVIRONMENT FUNDING

The Scottish Government has announced that the next round of applications for the Agri-Environmental Climate Scheme (AECS) will open in January 2018. The fund supports environmentally friendly land management practices to protect and enhance Scotland's natural heritage and help agricultural businesses adapt to climate change. A round for Improving Public Access is expected to open in March 2018. The scheme is jointly funded by the Scottish Government and the EU, with any new contracts guaranteed for the full five year term.

Environment Secretary, Roseanna Cunningham, said: "AECS supports a range of measures which will create a greener and more prosperous environment, including improving water quality, managing flood risk and protecting our iconic species and habitats. Crucially, it also supports the aims of our Climate Change Plan by reducing greenhouse gas emissions from farming."



WOODLANDS

TENANTS & TREES

The Herald reported that the Scottish Tenant Farmers Association (STFA) said that it had been alarmed to hear reports of some of Scotland's largest estates taking steps to bring tenancies to an end to replace tenant farmers with trees. It said: "Limited Partnership tenancies on upland units are especially vulnerable. It would seem that these tenancies are being terminated with little consideration of the tenant farming families to be displaced."

Landlords have been phasing out limited partnership leases, and there are now less than 400 of these tenancies still in existence, compared to 1,200 in 2003.

Scottish Land & Estates (SLE) said that STFA was attempting to reignite a 'trees versus tenants' debate. There is increased interest in planting trees, particularly on 'middle-hill' land, as a consequence of promises of improved government funding and greater prospects for the forestry industry post-Brexit.

Lord Johnstone, of SLE, said: "Looking ahead, there is a great deal of uncertainty about the amounts of public funding that will be available to support farming, so it is legitimate, indeed necessary, to look hard at the viability of agricultural units – tenanted or owner-occupied – and how those units can be organised to secure their future or make the best use of the land."

SHEEP & FORESTRY

Forestry Commission (FC) Scotland has opened up the Sheep and Trees Forestry Grants Package under the Forestry Grant Scheme to help farmers integrate new woodlands between 10 and 50 hectares into their farms. It will enable farmers to apply for a woodland creation grant and the forest infrastructure grant for the same area at the same time. This allows farmers to build access routes whilst also getting grants to get new woodlands established. A typical 50 hectare woodland could receive up to £200,000 for woodland creation and up to £40,000 in infrastructure grant aid.

Jo O'Hara, of FC Scotland said: "It is vital that farmers can continue to keep their sheep on the hills. Our new grants package can support this through helping them integrate woodlands into their business, increasing its commercial viability. Carefully managed woodlands can increase farm productivity and provide many other benefits too. The funding package creates an excellent opportunity to diversify and take advantage of land previously not considered possible due to a lack of access. Creating new woodland can offer sheep farmers an added flexibility to manage their land to its best potential and keep a regular income coming in."

New woodlands can provide important shelter and extended outwintering periods; improve farm business productivity – particularly on less productive land; help in providing more manageable grazing units; significantly improve on-farm access through well planned roads and also grow a valuable capital asset with having a source of timber and potential income stream. See: <http://bit.ly/2rCaBnf>



FISHFARMING & FISHERIES

FINFISH AQUACULTURE

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) has announced proposals for the future regulation of fishfarming in Scotland. The public is invited to comment on proposals to revise the way SEPA licences control the amount of waste a fishfarm can release, through a new approach called Depositional Zone Regulation. Regulatory controls will be strengthened and modernised so that the risks to Scotland's environment from existing fishfarms and future new farms are minimised.

New computer modelling will be used to better predict environmental impacts, increase the level of environmental monitoring undertaken by SEPA, and make it more attractive for operators to locate fishfarms in less sensitive areas with stronger tidal flows by allowing for progressive increases in stocking beyond a starting biomass. Under these proposals, growth must only occur where the combination of appropriate siting, and new techniques and processes, mean the environment can sustain it.

SEPA is also inviting views on the findings of an independent review of the Environmental Quality Standard for the in-feed sea-lice medicine, emamectin benzoate.

Terry A'Hearn, of SEPA, said that compliance with legal obligations is not negotiable, and is the minimum expected of all those regulated in every sector. The proposals laid out in this consultation

will help fishfarms to take positive steps towards reducing their environmental impact in a way that also delivers economic and social benefits.

The consultation closes on 31 August. See: www.sepa.org.uk/regulations/water/aquaculture.

• In addition, SEPA will consult on its Sector Plan for finfish aquaculture in early 2018. This plan will set out how SEPA proposes to work with operators to ensure full regulatory compliance and help operators go beyond compliance to achieve environmental excellence.

SEA-LICE

The Sunday Herald reported that Salmon & Trout Conservation Scotland (S&TCS) obtained emails from the Crown Estate under Freedom of Information legislation concerning emamectin benzoate (Slice), a pesticide used to kill sea-lice in farmed salmon [Mar 17]. SEPA had suppressed a report about emamectin and had reportedly abandoned plans to ban it after pressure from the fishfarming industry.

A study was carried out by the Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS) for the Scottish Aquaculture Research Forum (SARF) and posted online in August 2016. It suggested that emamectin contamination of the seabed was causing 'substantial, wide-scale reductions' in crabs, lobsters and other crustaceans. SAMS said it stood by its study, adding that it reported its results 'openly and without prejudice.'

However, the SAMS study was contained within a second report, and that report cast major doubts on the SAMS research. The second report was said to have been the result of concerns from independent, but unnamed, referees. Professor Kenny Black and Dr Tom Wilding, of SAMS, said that four of the five reviewers were 'from Merck' and warned that questions would be asked about the independence of the review process.

A spokeswoman for Merck's UK arm, MSD Animal Health, said: "We have noted some limitations in the retrospective analysis purporting to assess the effects of emamectin benzoate on benthic crustaceans. It has been used for more than 15 years for the safe and effective treatment and prevention of infestations of all parasitic stages of sea-lice on Atlantic salmon."

Scott Landsburgh, of the Scottish Salmon Producers' Organisation (SSPO), said: "The board of SARF felt that it was important for a layman's commentary to be published alongside the report to explain their reservations and set its findings in proper context."

A Scottish Government spokeswoman said: "It is normal for the reviewers of scientific work to be anonymous and several reviewers are used to make that process robust."

Other emails show officials from the Scottish Government, the Crown Estate and the fishfarming industry on SARF's board of trustees all agreed that the identity of referees should remain confidential. They also decided not to press-release the study.

Guy Linley-Adams, of STC Scotland, said: "This is a classic of how to deal with the unwanted results of environmental research. Allow those most threatened by the research to organise and hold sway over a peer review process, ensure that reviewers are set up to review extremely critically, give them anonymity. And then try to bury the report for good measure." He described SEPA's failure to stand up to the process as 'shocking' and demanded that it bans emamectin. He accused the Scottish Government of going 'along for the ride with the fishfarming lobby.'

Dr Richard Luxmoore, of the National Trust for Scotland, said: "It is extraordinary that SARF could think it acceptable to use consultants

employed by the manufacturers of the chemicals to review a report on their environmental impact. The efforts that these reviews have made to pick holes in a study of environmental pollution are remarkable. They read not like objective evaluations, but more like a concerted attempt to discredit an inconvenient truth."

The Sunday Herald reported that the Scottish Government was accused of intervening to block SEPA's proposed ban on emamectin. The Scottish Government, however, describes the accusations as 'unsubstantiated and false.'

Mark Ruskell MSP said: "The salmon farming industry appears to have used its influence at the heart of government to suppress independent scrutiny. There is an urgent need for parliament to run an inquiry into salmon farming and the growing failure to regulate an industry which has been given free reign by ministers to expand way beyond the limits of the environment."

Guy Linley-Adams accused the Scottish Government of being 'too close for comfort' to the multinational salmon farming industry. He said: "It has shown itself quite prepared to sacrifice the wider Scottish environment and, in the process, to muzzle its own environmental watchdog. [SEPA had been] silenced at the behest of the salmon farmers. It is high time MSPs of all parties forced the Scottish Government to bring the salmon farmers under proper control."

Don Staniford, of the Global Alliance Against Industrial Aquaculture, said: "Under this government, SEPA's powers have corroded away... The scientific evidence is so damning that it demands an immediate ban on the use of emamectin."

Terry A'Hearn, of SEPA, said that he took the decision not to publicise SEPA's approach after considering a range of views, including those of the industry and Scottish Government officials. He said: "I did not discuss the matter with the Cabinet Secretary. It was my decision. I'll take responsibility for it. People will judge whether it is right or wrong."

A Scottish Government spokesman said: "Officials have a duty to provide ministers with considered advice and to inform them of stakeholder concerns. There is nothing to suggest officials made any recommendation on how to proceed. The use of chemicals in the marine environment is a regulatory matter for SEPA."

WRASSE

The *BBC News* website reported that SSPO figures show that in 2016-17, £14m was spent on biological treatments for salmon, mainly through cleaner fish. The previous year the figure was £5.2m. In contrast, the spend on controversial medicinal treatments fell from £18.5m in 2015-16 to £13.8m last year. The overall spend on fish health management almost doubled from £26m to £49.4m.

It is feared that a lack of regulatory safeguards to protect wild wrasse, used as cleaner fish, could lead to them being over-fished [May 17]. Nick Underdown, from Open Seas, said: "Wrasse is an incredibly slow-growing species that's slow to reproduce and recovers very slowly if it's over exploited. What we're seeing here is an unregulated fishery, poorly managed, that's being bankrolled by the salmon farming industry. It is perverse for the salmon farming industry to protect its own stock and exploit a wild fishery."

Open Seas has identified regulatory loopholes in the management of wild wrasse stocks. It said there had been no stock assessments for wrasse and there were no limits on how much could be fished.

Efforts are under way for salmon farms to

become fully reliant on farm-sourced wrasse, but because they are slow growing it is likely to take three years to meet demand. About three million wrasse are needed to support the 60 million salmon produced in Scotland, but only about 600,000 currently come from farms. The rest are caught in creels and transported to fishfarms.

Scott Landsburgh, of the SSPO said: "We are taking steps to ensure [overfishing] won't be an issue. That's why we are introducing hatcheries to breed our own cleaner fish and a huge investment is going into that just now. We're introducing two new hatcheries in the next 12 months and we expect, in about three to four years, that we will not require any wild caught wrasse. For the time being, yes, we are taking some but we are very considerate about it and we are not taking any juvenile fish and are not taking any brood stock. So it's a very controlled take of the fish from the fishery."

Ralph Bickerdike, of Scottish Sea Farms, described the use of cleaner fish as 'transformational.' He said: "We are now seeing the fruits of the investment that has taken place over the last few years. At the end of 2016 we had the lowest lice levels recorded for over three years which is a tremendous achievement and we look forward to that continuing."

A spokeswoman for the Scottish Government said: "Scotland has a legislative and regulatory framework which balances growing aquaculture sustainably and protecting biodiversity and the environment on which aquaculture and wild fisheries depend. We are currently in the process of developing the framework for a viable sustainability project and anticipate we will be in a position to progress soon."

• Devon Wildlife Trust (DWT) claims that an estimated 3,000 live wrasse *per week* are being caught off the Devon coast and transported to Scotland. Until now, wrasse have not been commercially fished in Devon, but demand from fishfarms has meant that five species are now being targeted. Peter Burgess, of DWT, said: "We're calling for an immediate stop to the practice of removing live fish from Devon's Marine Protected Areas to satisfy the needs of Scottish fishfarms." 57,000 wrasse were taken over a period of 18 weeks in 2015 in Dorset.

AQUACULTURE ECONOMICS

A study by Marine Scotland and Highlands & Islands Enterprise, commissioned by the Scottish Government, showed that fish and shellfish farming contributes £620m to the national economy every year. The industry now supports more than 12,000 jobs and Scottish aquaculture production has increased by a third in the ten years to 2015, from 142,000 to 188,000 tonnes. Atlantic salmon production accounts for 90% of all economic impact, supporting 10,340 full-time equivalent jobs and generating £540m in gross value added. Other fish and shellfish species, like trout, mussels and oysters, are also evaluated. See: <http://bit.ly/2sc80t5>

GAULDRONS

Marine Harvest has applied for planning permission for a 10,000 m² fish hatchery beside an existing hatchery at Lossit Point in the Machrihanish Gauldrons in Argyll. The area is designated as 'sensitive countryside' in the local plan, *ie* to be used for non-industrial, agricultural and ecological use. There is no Environmental Impact Assessment; Marine Harvest said in the application: "Given the lack of ecological features of interest on this site no detailed ecological study has been performed." The Save the Gauldrons campaign emphasised the bay's recreational importance to local people, and has urged Marine Harvest to site the marine hatchery in a more ecologically and socially acceptable location.

INSHORE FISHING

The Scottish Creel Fishermen's Federation (SCFF) has put a case to the Scottish Government for a three mile limit to be reintroduced which prevents trawling in inshore waters. The restriction was lifted in 1984 to allow inshore trawling – now mainly for prawns. The SCFF's report concludes that the reinstatement of the limit would lead to 450 additional creel boats and more than 700 new jobs with an additional £45m of revenue. SCFF has also asked the Scottish Government to give the creel fishermen a 50% share of the nephrops fishery by 2022 to enable them to supply a growing live market, much of which is on the continent. Creelers can access only about 15% of the Scottish fishery, because fishing grounds are monopolised by trawlers largely supplying the low value scampi market.

Trawlermen and creel fishermen use different techniques to fish for the same species in the same grounds. Many skippers in the creel sector claim that their gear has been lost or destroyed when trawlers have dragged their nets through them. The creel fleet on the west coast is larger than the inshore trawling fleet but the trawlers catch much more by volume, although worth significantly less per tonne.

The SCFF report said: "In Scotland we have an economically absurd outcome whereby each tonne of nephrops caught by trawls in areas fishable by creels is contributing to an unnecessary degradation of the Scottish marine environment and a significant reduction in Scottish output, income, employment and profits, particularly in remote/rural areas. This is a manifestation of 'market failure.' Regrettably, Marine Scotland, which should be correcting the anomaly of excessive trawling effort, has adopted a *laissez faire* approach. This is precisely the wrong approach. Creelers have to comply with these creel limits otherwise they face the prospect of their creels being regularly towed away."

As a result of Marine Scotland's approach, and the *de facto* creel limits imposed by the trawl sector, SCFF said that trawlers take 87.7% of the Scottish nephrops catch.

The Scottish Government has announced that it will pilot ways of keeping creelers and trawlers apart by designating areas for their sole use [May 17].

The Scottish Fishermen's Federation (SFF), which represents the trawling sector, said that the proposals were 'disastrous' and would decimate its fleet. Bertie Armstrong, of SFF, said: "The report seems to demand a return to the three-mile fishing limit, which for good reason was abandoned 33 years ago. Careful reading of the report reveals that what is actually being demanded is the exclusion (and therefore demise) of two sustainable, profitable catching sectors – prawn trawling and scallop fishing – from inshore areas, in favour of another sector. This ignores the fact the present arrangement – a mixed inshore sector – has evolved in accordance with available resource and market demand. ... [Trawling] is an entirely sustainable industry that's doing no damage. They would find it terminal. With the sort of boats that are used for inshore trawling there is very little else you can do with them. You'd have to completely get rid of those boats, which now have no value, and reinvest. It makes no sense whatsoever, economically."

Fisheries Secretary, Fergus Ewing, said: "I will give this report from the SCFF full and proper consideration. The SCFF report makes a number of assumptions that will clearly require further investigation. That is why my recent announcement of inshore pilot schemes is timely and needed. These pilots will look at innovative

approaches to fisheries management and test whether a more local approach to fisheries management and separating different methods of fishing, such as creeling and trawling, can yield greater benefits for coastal communities."

**MARINE****BATHING WATERS**

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) said that of 84 officially designated bathing beaches, 73 beaches had met European water quality standards. 26 were rated 'excellent,' 36 were rated 'good,' 11 'sufficient' and 11 rated 'poor' in line with the European Bathing Water Directive.

However, overall water quality has improved since 2016, when 17 beaches were rated 'poor' and 17 'excellent.' SEPA said that it was working to ensure every beach in Scotland achieved the standards of the new European bathing water directive by 2020. Gairloch and Sand beaches in Wester Ross have been officially designated as bathing waters by the Scottish Government and will be monitored for the first time this year. Real-time water quality information is available on electronic signs at 29 beaches across the country over the summer bathing season.

• *The Sunday Herald* reported that Keep Scotland Beautiful (KSB) presented 2017 beach awards to four sites around the coast where the bathing water was rated 'poor' by SEPA for repeated high levels of faecal contamination [May 17]. They are South Beach in Ayr, Central Beach in Nairn, Cruden Bay in Aberdeenshire and Monifieth in Angus. Dr Ruth Stidson, of SEPA, said: "At all four of these locations we make daily water quality predictions to help people make informed decisions about whether to use the water. We display these forecasts on our electronic information signs at the beaches and on our website, mobile website and beach information line." A total of 26 beaches were rated 'poor' by SEPA in June. Heavy rain, such as that experienced this month, washes human and animal wastes into the sea, and can cause sewers to overflow.

Dr Richard Dixon, of Friends of the Earth Scotland, said that the KSB awards are 'seriously misleading' and 'close to farcical.' He said: "[Other aspects of beach management] mustn't be allowed to conceal the fact that the water isn't even safe to paddle in. The awards need a major overhaul if the public are to put any trust in them. The four beaches with poor water quality should be stripped of their awards immediately and the rules changed."

Hugo Tagholm, of Surfers Against Sewage, stressed that all beach users needed real-time information about water quality. He said: "We have real concerns about any awards that may mislead the public into thinking water quality is better than official results show. Should a beach with poor water quality really be receiving a beach award, given good water quality is a specific criteria for the award? We'd urge much more scrutiny from Keep Scotland Beautiful when considering awards."

A KSB spokesman said: "They are awarded on the basis of 25 criteria, of which water quality is only one. The criteria are designed to reflect the entirety of the visitor experience and they also recognise excellence in beach management, on-site facilities, benefits to local people and the wider environment ... If water quality is important to you, then choose a beach where the water quality is monitored and made available by SEPA, and check the latest status on their website or app."

NON-NATIVE SEAWEED

The *BBC News* website reported that a non-native invasive species of seaweed, *Sargassum muticum*, wireweed, has been found to have spread to western parts of Scotland. Wireweed occurs naturally in Japan and China, is thought to have arrived in UK waters in the 1960s. *S. muticum* can be spread via its spores being carried from one place to another in ships' ballast water, and by rafts of the plants floating to new locations. It displaces native species through over-growing and starving them of sunlight. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has published a report which says it can now be found from the Firth of Clyde to Skye. The spread of *S. muticum* is described as the most noticeable change in the survey of marine biodiversity and climate change. The report said that climate change may facilitate its further spread, but added that it could be able to extend its range without the aid of warmer temperatures.

See: *SNH Commissioned Report 939: Marine Biodiversity and Climate Change (MarClim): Scotland 2014/15*; <http://bit.ly/2sdLHhQ>

OFFSHORE ENERGY

SNH has published a report detailing wildlife observations over ten years collected around a wide range of wave and tidal energy converters at two test facilities run by the European Marine Energy Centre (EMEC) in Orkney. Detailed records have been kept of the birds and marine mammals present offshore and living in and around the test areas. SNH, Marine Scotland and EMEC have analysed the observations collected since 2005.

The study investigated how species distribution and density varied across the test sites, relative to different levels of site-testing activity, over the ten-year period. Comparisons were made among the number of animals present before any turbines, or their support structures, were in place; when support structures only were in place; when turbines were in place; and when turbines were in place and operational.

Statistical analysis of around 10,000 hours of observations at the Fall of Warness tidal test site off Eday indicated a change in density and redistribution of some bird species when construction work started. However, in nearly all cases, numbers returned to around previous levels once the tidal turbines were installed and operational. Observations of seals, whales and dolphins revealed similar findings.

Increased boat activity associated with the initial construction of the devices might cause the temporary disturbance and displacement of some species, but numbers recover once this phase of activity is complete and the tidal turbines are operational. For some species observed at the sites, the patterns of change found may be due to population-wide variances which are not directly linked to the activities around the test areas.

At the Billia Croo wave test site, near Stromness, around 6,500 hours of observations were completed, but no significant changes in distribution or density of birds or mammals were detected.

George Lees, of SNH, said: "The observations used in the study were made from land overlooking the test sites, and so possible wildlife interactions with turbines below the surface are not included in the research. Even so, initial results are reassuring."

Caitlin Long, of EMEC, said: "This project was set up to assist the industry in developing an understanding of the potential wildlife displacement associated with the deployment of marine energy devices. The culmination of the extensive wildlife observation programme and this statistical analysis project should aid regulators, advisory bodies and developers in assessing the potential environmental effects of deploying such devices in our precious marine environment."

SNH Commissioned Report 947: Analysis of the possible displacement of bird and marine mammal species related to the installation and operation of marine energy conversion systems. See: <http://bit.ly/2snsTNo>

CROMARTY FIRTH

The Herald reported that campaign group, Cromarty Rising, said that parliamentary statements that the Scottish Government had not been consulted formally about the Cromarty Firth Port Authority’s application to the Maritime & Coastguard Agency (MCA) to conduct ship-to-ship oil transfers at the mouth of the Cromarty Firth are inaccurate [Mar 17]. Cromarty Rising said that, despite repeated denials, documents it obtained under freedom of information show ‘a legal and valid invitation’ to consultation was sent to the head of Marine Scotland’s (MS) licensing operations team, on behalf of the Scottish Government, in December 2015. Transport Scotland Ports & Harbours staff advised MS not to respond to the consultation ‘in line with a previously established Scottish Government position.’ The group said: “This means the Scottish Government knowingly and deliberately blocked their own scientists’ response to the consultation six days before it closed.”

Cromarty Rising further alleges that Paul Wheelhouse, minister for Business, Innovation & Energy, misled MSPs in a statement to the Scottish Parliament on 2 May this year. In addition, Ian Blackford MP told the House of Commons: “It is safe to say Marine Scotland was not contacted by the MCA or by the UK government.” He said: “[This is] a serious matter not least because of the potential threat to people in my community of ship-to-ship transfers taking place and of the Scottish Government not being adequately consulted on their responsibilities for environmental protection.”

Cromarty Rising accepts it is possible Mr Blackford did not know a formal invitation to consultation had been received and a decision taken in the Scottish Government not to respond. However, it said that this decision represents in European law a failure to protect the Special Area of Conservation established for bottlenose dolphins and marine life.

A Scottish Government spokesman said: “The Scottish Government was not invited to respond by the Department of Transport during the original application process. As has already been made clear, MS officials were included in a mass email from environmental consultants, with no direct approach. There is no evidence to support these allegations and it is simply wrong to suggest a response was blocked. As is normal practice, civil servants in different policy areas discuss and exchange views on matters of overlapping interest.”

MPA MONITORING

A new Marine Protected Area (MPA) Monitoring Strategy has been developed by the Scottish Government, in partnership with SNH and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. The strategy will provide a long-term approach to monitoring Scottish waters, ensuring that detailed information is collected from the MPA network to create a more accurate picture of the health of marine environments. It will also encourage collaborations between marine stakeholders and coastal communities, which will better coordinate existing monitoring activities.

The strategy is supported by a new three-year project funded by the European Maritime Fisheries Fund which will offer opportunities for fishermen to gather monitoring data. This will improve the Scottish Government’s understanding

of marine habitats and the effectiveness of MPA management measures. There are 31 Nature Conservation MPAs. See: <http://bit.ly/2sPxly8>

OCEAN PLASTICS

Researchers aboard the Greenpeace ship, *Beluga II*, found microplastics in basking shark feeding grounds and plastic pollution in the habitats of puffins and seals on a two month voyage around Scotland [May 17]. Plastic was also discovered in the nests and beaks of seabirds in internationally significant seabird colonies on Bass Rock, Isle of May and the Shiant Isles. Plastic bottles, bags, packaging and fragments were found on more than 30 remote beaches surveyed. The expedition conducted over 40 scientific trawls in remote and biodiverse areas. The samples will be sent to Exeter University for full analysis with complete results to be published later this year.



POLITICS & PARLIAMENT

ISLANDS BILL

The Islands (Scotland) Bill has been introduced to parliament by the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity, Fergus Ewing, to meet the unique needs of Scotland’s islands now and in the future; it will help to create the right environment for sustainable growth and empowered communities. Measures in the bill will include:

- A requirement to ‘island-proof’ future legislation and policies
- The creation of a National Islands Plan
- Statutory protection for the Na h-Eileanan an Iar Scottish parliamentary constituency boundary
- Greater flexibility around councillor representation within island communities
- Extended powers to island councils in relation to marine licencing

The National Islands Plan will set out the strategic direction for supporting island communities, continuing the momentum generated by the Our Islands, Our Future campaign and the work of the Islands Strategic Group. See: <http://bit.ly/2rnr3r1>

STINK PITS

Christine Grahame MSP led a debate in the Scottish Parliament on the use of stink pits on game shooting estates. Stink pits (also known as middens) are piles of carcasses, surrounded by snares, that are used by gamekeepers to lure in predators that can then be killed. The use of stink pits is currently legal in Scotland, under a special derogation for gamekeepers. The charity, OneKind, has also been campaigning to ask the Scottish Government to consider banning the use of stink pits on ethical, animal welfare and public health grounds. Ms Grahame’s motion received cross-party political support.

The Environment Secretary, Roseanna Cunningham, spoke at the end of the debate and said: “Stink pits are used as a way of maximising the effectiveness of snaring as a means of fox control. They are used to draw foxes into fewer, more easily checked sites; thus, they have the benefit of concentrating snaring effort and reducing the number of snares that are set in the wider countryside.” She confirmed that stink pit use will be under review by the Scottish Government’s Technical Assessment Group, who will review them as part of an overall snaring review. It will also be looked at by an independent group that will review grouse moor management practices – as yet not appointed.

SUTHERLAND BUY-OUT

Garbh Allt Community Initiative (GACI) has secured funding to purchase Marrel, West Helmsdale, Gartmore and Portgower common grazing townships from Sutherland Estates. The community buyout of 3,000 acres has secured £29,918 in matched funding from the Beatrice Partnership Fund (linked to the Beatrice Offshore windfarm in the outer Moray Firth). GACI has also been awarded £273,000 from the Scottish Land Fund.

FISHFARM INQUIRY

The Rural Economy & Connectivity committee is to conduct an inquiry into salmon farming in Scotland and the issues raised in a petition, *Marine Fish Farms (Legislative & Regulatory Control) (PE 1598)*, lodged by Salmon & Trout Conservation Scotland (S&TCS) in February 2016.

The S&TCS petition recommended that the Scottish Parliament should seek to amend the Aquaculture & Fisheries (Scotland) Act 2007 to give Scottish ministers a statutory duty to inspect farms and enforce sea-lice control on salmon farms. This is for the express purpose of protecting wild salmonid fish from juvenile sea-lice infestation from marine cage fishfarms. S&TCS also asked for statutory powers to order immediate culls of any marine cage fishfarm where average adult female sea-lice numbers of farmed fish remain persistently above Code of Good Practice thresholds. Over the medium term, S&TCS argued that those farms consistently failing to control sea-lice should be closed or relocated to move the worst performing farms away from salmonid rivers and migration routes. S&TCS supports a renewed focus on moving to full closed containment of farmed salmon production in Scotland, with complete ‘biological separation’ of wild and farmed fish.

The Environment, Climate Change & Land Reform committee is to consider the issue alongside the Rural Economy & Connectivity committee.

- The Scottish Parliament information centre (SPiCe) is to review the literature on the environmental impacts of farmed salmon in Scotland ahead of the above inquiry.

See: www.salmon-troutscotland.org

GROUSE PETITION

A new public petition has been launched asking the Scottish Parliament to ‘urge the Scottish Government to sponsor a comprehensive and independent study into the full economic impacts of driven grouse shooting.’ It coincides with the Environment Secretary’s announcement that she intends to commission research into the costs and benefits of large shooting estates to Scotland’s economy and biodiversity [May 17]. The closing date 18 July. See: <http://bit.ly/2sluS49>



GENERAL ENVIRONMENT

KEEP IT WILD

The John Muir Trust (JMT)’s Keep It Wild campaign calls on the Scottish Government to use the forthcoming Planning Bill to keep Wild Land Areas free from industrial-scale development, similar to the protection already in place in National Parks and National Scenic Areas (NSA)s. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) said that the areas of ‘high wildness’ were nationally important in Scottish planning policy but were not protected by law.

JMT commissioned a YouGov poll of 1,028 people in Scotland which found that 52% of those who took part strongly agreed that wild land areas should continue to be protected from large-scale infrastructure, such as industrial-scale windfarms,

major electricity transmission and super-quarries, while 28% 'tended to agree.' A further 5% 'tended to disagree' but 0% 'strongly disagreed,' 12% remained neutral and 3% were undecided.

A Scottish Government spokesman said: "We have clear planning policies in place to ensure wind farms are developed in appropriate locations and Scottish Planning Policy published in 2014 provides additional protection for both our National Parks and NSAs as well as additional scrutiny of proposals in or affecting wild land areas. Whilst we need to pursue Scotland's vast potential to generate power from renewable sources, it is equally clear that we need to do this in a way that protects Scotland's magnificent natural environment and each application is viewed in this context and based on its own merits; in a number of cases where, on the balance of evidence, unacceptable impacts on visual amenity have been identified, development proposals have been rejected."

David Johnstone, of Scottish Land & Estates, writing on the letters page of *The Herald*, said: "Reference is made [by JMT] to 'designated wild land' areas. These areas carry no legal designation. There is good reason for this: wild land is a subjective concept and legal designation requires objective and consistently measurable criteria. Wild land mapping was something seized on by individuals and organisations with a largely anti-windfarm agenda following an academic exercise by Leeds University. It relies on subjective tests, such as perceived ruggedness and how people feel in a landscape. Even the more objective criteria such as the absence of evidence of human development are vague, since signs of older human existence is allowed. These 'tests' are individual and rely on personal knowledge of how a landscape comes about.

"We need some honesty. There is almost nowhere in Scotland which has been shaped only by nature and might therefore be considered wild or wilderness. Scotland has some beautiful, valued landscapes but shaping by human development is an integral part of what they are. If we are to have a living, working countryside, humans will need to be allowed to continue to shape it.

"Of course, there are some places that need sensitive treatment and there are some aspects of our past that we should be careful not to obliterate from our landscapes, we would not for a second seek to deny this, but let's not pretend we are preserving wildness."

PROJECT PUFFIN

RSPB Scotland has launched Project Puffin, which combines the latest technology with citizen science to find out more about puffins' diet, where they go to find food and how their numbers are changing. Visitors to puffin colonies can take photographs of the birds carrying fish for their chicks throughout the breeding season over the next two months and upload them to a dedicated webpage. RSPB Scotland will then identify the fish to build up a picture of what the puffins are feeding their chicks. It is estimated that puffin numbers will go down by between 50-70% by 2065. See: <http://bit.ly/2sqJGuK>

MAIDENHILL

East Renfrewshire Council has approved plans for more than 800 new homes on the outskirts of Newton Mearns. Some of the new houses would be built on land designated as greenbelt. The Maidenhill development is to be built by Cala Homes and Taylor Wimpey. The proposals have been criticised by locals who say it could create flooding problems in the area. Communal greenspace is planned, as well as a primary school, sports and play facilities.

STAFFIN HOUSING

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that SNH has dropped its objection to a new housing development in Staffin, Skye [Jan 17]. A planning application for six new houses on common grazings tenanted by the Stenscholl crofting township has been submitted to Highland Council; if consent is granted it will be the first development of its kind in the area since the late 1990s. SNH reiterated its previous concerns about the crofting landscape and the Trotternish National Scenic Area. However, its submission to the planning application adds that 'the effects of this particular proposal would be localised and it would not, by itself, affect the overall integrity of the NSA.' Ownership of the planned houses is divided between the Staffin Community Trust, Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust and Lochalsh & Skye Housing Association. The development, planned for a site near Staffin Primary School, also includes two business units and a storage facility.

BANNOCKBURN HOUSING

An outline planning application proposing a 250 house development to the south of Bannockburn has been lodged with Stirling Council. The National Trust for Scotland (NTS) has said that the plans, near the historic site of the Battle of Bannockburn, would have a 'major impact' on the area. Scott McMaster, of NTS, said the plans were 'a further encroachment on the heritage site which has slowly been eroded over the past 50 years.' In its response to Stirling Council, NTS also highlighted concerns about the impact of the development on the Bannock Burn itself, saying that any flood defences could contribute to further erosion of the burn.

CAIRNGORMS PARK

A plan for managing the Cairngorms National Park over the next five years has been officially launched [Mar 17]. Proposals for the Cairngorms include affordable housing, increased woodland, restoring peatland and investing in walking routes on Deeside and Speyside. A target to have 200 new affordable homes built by 2022 and delivering superfast broadband to 'hard to reach' parts of the park also form part of the five-year plan.

FAILED WILDLIFE PROSECUTION

The Sunday Post reported that public prosecutors from Scotland's Crown Office have dropped another case of alleged wildlife crime, the fifth in two months [May 17]. A gamekeeper, John Goodenough, had been charged after he was allegedly caught with illegal gin traps covered in animal blood, with dead fox cubs found nearby, in May 2016. He was employed at the time by Dalreoch Farming & Sporting Estates and it was alleged that he was using the illegal traps on a neighbouring farm in Ayrshire.

The case was due to be heard at Ayr Sheriff Court in March, but the Crown Office dropped the case two days beforehand, because of a 'paperwork blunder' – believed to be an incorrect date written on a form.

WILDLIFE CRIMES

Police Scotland is appealing for information after the shooting of a short-eared owl was witnessed on the Leadhills (Hopetoun) Estate, South Lanarkshire. The *Carlisle Gazette* said that the shooting was witnessed on 31 May at 1145; the vehicle thereafter drove off to the B7040 Elvanfoot Road. The location given is the same as described in an earlier Police appeal for information following the witnessed shooting of a hen harrier [May 17]. The Raptor Persecution UK blog said that 49 previous raptor persecution crimes have

been recorded on this estate over the last 14 years; there have only ever been two convictions of estate gamekeepers.

WILDLIFE FORENSICS

The Wildlife Forensics Development Programme will create formal ties between the Scottish Government's wildlife DNA forensics unit, Edinburgh University's research unit at the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, and the Roslin Institute. The partnership will provide a platform for international research and training into greater use of forensic techniques in wildlife crime. Scotland has the only dedicated wildlife DNA forensics laboratory in the UK, hosted at Science & Advice for Scottish Agriculture (SASA).

SATELLITE TAGS

The Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) and SNH are co-sponsoring a new CivTech challenge aimed at finding a technology-based solution to find 'disappearing' satellite-tagged raptors and to devise a solution to find those tags, or at least provide indestructible, real-time information about the tag's last location before it was tampered with.

The lack of hard evidence when a tagged bird, together with its tag, disappears causes problems for the wildlife crime enforcement agencies as it is hard to prove that the bird has actually been illegally killed. In a small number of cases, the satellite tag could just have malfunctioned although the expected frequency of this happening is around 2% [May 17].

CivTech is a Scottish Government-led initiative, first piloted in 2016, which challenges creative technologists to come up with a solution to public sector problems, which have included improving flood forecasting and air quality in urban areas; see: <http://bit.ly/2rvK4E7>

The Raptor Persecution UK blog said that a solution won't enable identification of an individual criminal, especially on an estate that employs multiple gamekeepers, but it might create a deterrent. At the very least, it should provide enough information for the Scottish Government to impose civil sanctions on that estate [May 17]. Any new solution found may be trialled in the Cairngorms National Park.

NW HIGHLANDS GEOPARK

The North West Highlands Geopark launched a crowdfunding appeal to avert a financial crisis which could lead to it losing its UNESCO status [Apr 17]. It has made one member of staff redundant and has raised £29,200 towards its annual costs of £100,000. This will allow the visitor centre to keep running over the summer, and work will start on a new business plan with Highlands & Islands Enterprise. In 2016, there were 8,000 visitors and £30,000 income. The seven UK Geoparks currently generate an estimated £8.7m a year, a figure which is expected to increase.

GREENHOUSE GASES

Scotland met its annual climate change target for 2015 despite a slight rise in emissions compared with the previous year. Emissions were measured at 45.5 million tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent in 2015, a small increase on revised figures for 2014, up 1.8% from 44.7 million tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent. The target for the year had been set at 46.928 million tonnes.

Climate Change Secretary, Roseanna Cunningham, said that the figures indicate that Scotland is on course to meet its long-term goals, with an interim 2020 target to reduce emissions by at least 42% on baseline levels. She proposed increasing the 2050 target from an 80% reduction on 1990 baseline levels to 90%.

She said that public consultation will begin soon on a proposed Climate Change Bill, while the

Scottish Government's draft climate change plan will be published next year [Mar 17].

However, emissions from transport have 'barely changed' with transport as the biggest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. Ms Cunningham said that the government aims to reduce transport emissions by one third by 2030 compared with 2014, and has invested over £1 billion each year in public and sustainable transport.

AIR POLLUTION

A report shows that, in the last 18 months, 40 key actions have been progressed as part of the Clean Air for Scotland strategy involving the Scottish Government, local authorities, the NHS, Transport Scotland and Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA).

Key activity includes working with local authorities to introduce the country's first Low Emission Zone by 2018, including on-going engagement with the bus and freight sectors; Scotland becoming the first country in Europe to adopt in law the World Health Organisation's guidelines on fine particulate matter and funding for 13 new monitoring stations (adding to the 16 already in place); the creation of four new Air Quality Management Areas, bringing the total to 38 in Scotland, all in locations designed to give the best insight into pollution country wide; the development of an app which advises people about alternative routes to help reduce exposure to pollution; a permanent exhibition at the Glasgow Science Centre dedicated to air quality and encouraging alternative methods of travel through the launch of the National Walking Action Plan and an updated Cycling Action Plan.

Research published by Global Action Plan, organisers of National Clean Air Day, shows that 81% of Scots believe it is important to tackle air pollution, yet only 28% have taken steps to reduce the air pollution they create. Half of those 28% are replacing their car journeys with walking, cycling or public transport, while the rest are making sure vehicles are well maintained and don't idle in traffic.

See: <http://bit.ly/2srAnhv>

LOCH LEVEN, KINROSS

The Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (CEH), SNH and partners have carried out research into Loch Leven's water quality. Loch Leven was blighted by poisonous, blue-green algal blooms and murky water [Jun 92]. It was estimated to have cost the local community more than £1m in lost revenue. The loch is an internationally important wildlife site with Site of Special Scientific interest, Special Protection Area, Ramsar site & National Nature Reserve designations.

A catchment management group, including SNH, SEPA, Scottish Water and Perth & Kinross Council (PKC), has completed a variety of management interventions in the first catchment plan of its kind in Scotland. Existing sewage works have been upgraded and a new one built; local authority policies have been changed to ensure that strict waste water treatment arrangements are incorporated into any new build. Grass buffer strips on field margins and soil retention areas have reduced soil erosion and the woollen mill has stopped discharging pollutants into the loch.

Levels of pollution, mainly caused by excessive amounts of phosphorus entering the loch, have been falling over the last 25 years. This has led to improvements in water clarity, increases in the abundance and diversity of aquatic plants, better habitat, and more food for fish and birds.

CEH has monitored the water quality at Loch Leven for almost 50 years. However, a recent study by CEH, SEPA, PKC and SNH found

that phosphorus concentrations have started to increase again, possibly due to some septic tank systems not working efficiently and to land use problems in some parts of the catchment associated with the increasing intensity of storm events due to climate change. Loch Leven has been chosen by SEPA as a diffuse pollution priority catchment for 2018/19.

Water quality is crucial to the health of the Loch Leven fishery; brown trout, pike and perch populations have recovered strongly.

HILLTRACKS

The Scottish Environment LINK Hilltracks group has asked hillgoers to assess the damage caused by vehicle tracks and to photograph or video any instances of new or expanded upland tracks that are harming the landscape or environment. This evidence will be used in a LINK report, due to be published in spring 2018, into whether current legislation is working.

There have been concerns that the primary purpose of bulldozed tracks does not in every case fit within the intention of permitted development. If new tracks are claimed to be for agriculture or forestry, they cannot be refused permission, even if located within 'wild landscapes' or National Parks. Since 2014, landowners have had to notify councils before constructing or upgrading hilltracks, but do not need to apply for planning permission in most cases.

In the last two years, major new vehicle tracks have appeared in a number of popular walking areas including Glen Clova, Blair Atholl, Glen Shee, Drumochter and the Aberdeenshire hills.

The LINK Hilltracks group monitors local authority planning websites, looking for new proposals and expresses concerns or comments on specific tracks. Tracks relating to hydro power or other infrastructure schemes in the uplands will have received full planning permission but are still of interest, as construction methods and restoration works can often be poor.

The campaign is backed by the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland, Badenoch & Strathspey Conservation Group, Cairngorms Campaign, NTS, North East Mountain Trust, Ramblers Scotland, RSPB Scotland, Scottish Campaign for National Parks and Scottish Wild Land Group. It has also received funding from Scottish Environment LINK Discretionary Project Fund, British Mountaineering Council and Scottish Mountaineering Trust. See: <http://bit.ly/2s2qRxC>; contact: hilltracks@scotlink.org

• The CNPA has initiated enforcement action against the Cluny Estate for an unlawful track up Carn Leth Choin at the head of Glen Banchor, by Laggan. The CNPA had been in discussions with the estate about restoring the track voluntarily. According to www.parkswatchscotland, the lower part of the track was constructed at an earlier date and is understood to be outside the current enforcement action. See: <http://bit.ly/2sy7NuW>



ENERGY

MAY RENEWABLES

WWF Scotland analysed renewables data from WeatherEnergy. It found that in several parts of Scotland, homes fitted with solar PV panels had enough sunshine to generate more than 100% of the electricity needs of an average household. There was also enough sunshine to generate more than 90% of an average household's hot water needs with solar hot water panels in Aberdeen, Dumfries, Dundee, Lerwick, Perth, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness and Stirling. The sunniest place was Lerwick, which generated 114% of an

average household electricity demand, followed closely by Dundee with 112%.

Wind turbines provided 863.5 GW of electricity to the National Grid during May, enough electricity to supply 95% of Scottish homes. Wind generated enough output to supply 100% or more of Scottish homes on 11 of the 31 days in May.

Scotland's total electricity consumption, including homes, business and industry, last month was 1,857 GW. Wind power generated the equivalent of 46% of Scotland's entire electricity needs for the month.

WINDFARMS & PLANNING

The Herald reported that industry body, Scottish Renewables, has challenged reports that the number of safeguards for windfarm development have been relaxed over the past ten years. It said that part of the confusion arose from comparisons being drawn between maps produced by Highland Council in 2006 and 2016.

Lindsay Roberts, of Scottish Renewables, said: "More than 80% of land in the Highland region is completely out of bounds to windfarm development or provided with 'significant protection' by Scottish Government planning policy. Breaking that figure down, windfarms can't be located in the National Parks and National Scenic Areas which make up a fifth of Highland Council's region. This was introduced in 2014 with the support of industry. An additional 5,670 square miles, a further 59% of the local authority's area, are deemed 'areas of significant protection' where development could only proceed in certain circumstances where adverse effects on these areas can be overcome.

"As Scotland's renewable energy industry has developed, so too have the protections afforded to Scotland's landscape. Many of the areas under 'significant protection' in Scottish Government planning policy have been introduced since 2006, including the development of protections for areas of wild land. The two maps from which campaign groups have drawn their conclusions cannot be compared. The older map shows local, technical constraints, where things such as a lack of wind connections [*sic*] would have made it challenging to develop windfarms at that time."

WINDFARM UPDATES

Dumfries & Galloway: The North Lowther Energy Initiative, a partnership between Buccleuch Estates and 2020 Renewables, has submitted an application to the Scottish Government for the 35 turbine North Lowther windfarm in the Lowther Hills east of Sanquhar. Alan Baker, of 2020 Renewables, said: "There is scope for widespread habitat enhancement which could be tailored to benefit birds, particularly raptors and waders."

Highland: The Scottish Government has refused permission for Force 9 Energy and EDF Energy Renewables' 13 turbine Cnoc an Eas windfarm in Glenurquhart near Loch Ness following a public local inquiry [May 16]. The reporter said that the proposed development would have a 'significant visual impact' on an area of special landscape value. The developer was refused permission by Highland Council last year, but appealed the decision.

• Work on the Tom nan Clach windfarm on the Cawdor Estate, near Nairn, has been halted after ground plovers hatched two chicks on the site. A spokesman for RSPB Scotland said: "We originally objected to the scheme because it had one of the highest densities of golden plover ever recorded in the UK."

• Anders Povlsen is seeking a judicial review in the Court of Session over the Creag Riabhach windfarm on the Altnaharra Estate in the first

case of its kind. [Dec 16]. Povlsen's Wildland Ltd owns the neighbouring Loyal, Kinloch, Hope and Melness Estates. The windfarm was approved last year, despite its location, partially, on wild land. Scottish National Heritage (SNH) objected to the original application because of its adverse impact on wild land areas and wider Sutherland landscape.

Mr Povlsen argued that the windfarm should have been rejected on the grounds that it poses a threat to local tourism and will damage the landscape. In the court action, Mr Povlsen claimed that ministers have shown a 'clear and consistent decision-making and safeguarding of wild land' in rejecting other projects in different parts of Scotland. It was claimed that the windfarm was the first case in which consent was given for 'commercial wind-scale turbines within wild land.'

James Findlay, counsel for Wildland Ltd, told the Court of Session: "There is no justification here for why, in this case, significant impacts are outweighed by what, on the face of it, are normal benefits from a windfarm of this size. In this case, where one is promoting development in an area which is subject to significant policy protection, one requires clear and cogent reasons. The heart of my complaint is that there are no reasons for rejecting SNH's view."

Scottish ministers said that they did give proper and adequate reasons for their decision in granting consent. They said they did not fail to take into account any relevant material consideration and were entitled to reject the advice of SNH. The ministers accepted that the visual impact at two viewpoints would be 'major and significant' but said 'those views would be experienced by a relatively small number of physically able climbers and walkers.' The 'lone mountain landscape character area' of Ben Klibreck would remain and key views would be unaffected.

Ministers said that they found the landscape and visual impact of the windfarm to be acceptable and considered that it will make a significant contribution to reducing carbon dioxide emissions and had the potential for substantial economic benefit.

Ruth Crawford QC, for the ministers, said: "What we are dealing with here is the paradigm case of the exercise of planning judgement."

OFFSHORE WIND

RSPB Scotland has confirmed it has started a legal challenge against the Inner House of the Court of Session's ruling in respect of four offshore windfarms in the firths of Tay and Forth [May 17]. The Inch Cape, Neart na Gaoithe and Seagreen Alpha and Bravo projects were approved by Scottish ministers in 2014; RSPB Scotland won a subsequent appeal which was then overturned. RSPB Scotland is now seeking permission to appeal to the UK Supreme Court.

Anne McCall, of RSPB Scotland, said: "RSPB Scotland continues to fully support the development of renewable energy and the vast majority of projects continue to pose no significant threat to birds or other wildlife. However, we are concerned that this judgment could set worrying precedents for the protection of wildlife across Scotland and the UK."

A statement from Mainstream Renewable Power, developer of Neart na Gaoithe windfarm, said: "Rapid advances in offshore wind technology have enabled us to reduce the number of turbines to be installed from 125 in the original consent application in 2012, to a maximum of 64 turbines today."

OFFSHORE WIND RESEARCH

The European Offshore Wind Deployment Centre, together with the EU, is to fund a £2.6m research programme based in Aberdeen Bay. Projects announced include one by the River Dee Trust and Marine Scotland Science to assess the interactions between salmon and sea trout with offshore wind technology; SMRU Consulting and the University of St Andrews will look at improving the understanding of bottlenose dolphin movements along the east coast of Scotland; MacArthur Green will measure connectivity between auk special protection areas populations and offshore windfarms, and track the non-breeding season movements of adult auks and Oxford Brookes University is to examine the socio-economic impact of offshore wind on the human environment.

WEST ISLAY TIDAL PARK

DP Marine Energy Ltd has received planning consent for the 30 turbine, 30 MW West Islay Tidal Energy Park, six kilometres off the southwest coast.

KRAKEN OILFIELD

Enquest and Cairn Energy have started production from the Kraken oilfield, 75 miles east of Shetland. The 130 million barrel field is one of the biggest to be brought on stream in recent years, and is expected to be in production for 20 years. Kraken is one of a number of heavy oil finds made off Shetland in the 1980s but left undeveloped because the cost of processing the output was seen as prohibitive. Modern production techniques allow output of around 50,000 barrels a day.

 **TOURISM & RECREATION**

FIFE CORE PATH

The Fife core path, 507, linking Lochgelly and Cowdenbeath, has been reopened [Apr 17]. Ramblers Scotland members campaigned to get the path reopened, including writing to Fife Council's access team and highlighting the closure, by a local landowner, in local media.

ESTATE SALE

Ledgowan Estate, near Achnasheen in Wester Ross is for sale. There has been an ongoing problem with public access to the 11,000 acre estate, with ten miles of controversial new hill track constructed for stalking [Dec 15].

ASSYNT NATURE TRAIL

A new nature trail has been opened at Glencanisp Lodge in Assynt to formally launch the Coigach & Assynt Living Landscape Partnership Scheme, a partnership between 14 different organisations which are working to deliver 28 projects that will collectively enhance the area's natural, built and cultural heritage. The Glencanisp Nature Trail is being delivered by the Assynt Foundation, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, and the Scottish Rural Development Programme fund for Improving Public Access.

ARRAN COASTAL WAY

A 65 mile circular route around the Isle of Arran has been added to the Scotland's Great Trails network by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). It is the 29th Long Distance Route (LDR) to achieve this status; these routes are at least 25 miles long and largely off-road with a clearly defined path and a high standard of waymarking, with a range of visitor services along the way. The Arran Access Trust (AAT) took on responsibility for the route which links 12 coastal villages and has

funding from the Coastal Communities Fund.

See: www.coastalway.co.uk; www.snh.gov.uk/sgt

MARINE CODE

The Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code (SMWWC) has been revised, updated and re-launched by SNH. The best practice code aims to promote enjoyment of marine wildlife and raise awareness about the best ways to watch animals as well as providing guidance on how best to enjoy watching these animals. The code, originally launched in 2006, has been updated to reflect changes in legislation, advances in technology and updated contacts.

The SMWWC is complemented by a 62 page *Guide to Best Practice for Watching Marine Wildlife*.

The Marine Code has useful information on how to act responsibly around marine wildlife – much in the same way as the Outdoor Access Code does for land-based wildlife.

See: www.snh.gov.uk/marinecode; email: marinecode@snh.gov.uk

 **NEWS OF ORGANISATIONS**

CROFTING COMMISSION

Rod Mackenzie has been appointed as convener of the Crofting Commission. One of six commissioners elected in March, he represents the East Highlands [Mar 17]. Rural Economy Secretary, Fergus Ewing, said: "With the appointment of the new convener, the creation of the new board of commissioners and the recruitment of a new chief executive earlier this year, I believe crofting can look forward to a period of stability and a positive focus on issues that will greatly improve the lives of those living in remote and rural areas."

IUCN

The Scottish Government has been confirmed as a member of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). IUCN is composed of both government and civil society organisations. It provides public, private and non-governmental organisations with the knowledge and tools that enable human progress, economic development and nature conservation to take place together.

SSC

The Scottish Seabird Centre has submitted a planning application to East Lothian Council for a National Marine Centre at North Berwick harbour. The North Berwick Harbour Trust Association has objected to the planning application, saying that the plans 'are set to fundamentally and irrevocably alter the harbour and are likely to jeopardise the activity that takes place there.'

SFWAG

The Scottish Farming & Wildlife Advisers' Group has been formed by 12 independent farm conservation advisers covering most of Scotland. The chairman is Richard Lockett. The Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) ceased to operate in 2009, and was run as a charity. The new group includes some former FWAG advisers, collaborating to promote conservation.

SWT

Dr Linda Rosborough has been announced as the next chair of the Trust's governing Council, taking over from Robin Harper in September. She was previously director of Marine Scotland.

This issue is being sent early to Printsmith (on 28 June) as it is closing for two weeks holiday.

Any additional news will be held over until the July issue. Apologies.

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